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Committee on the Development of Trade

Group of Experts on the Simplification and Standardization of External Trade Documents

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Trade and Development Board

Advisory Services on Trade Documentation

TRADE DOCUMENTATION INFORMATION

ISO RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE WRITING OF DATES AND NUMBERING OF WEEKS

(Note by the Inter-regional Adviser on Trade Documentation)

1. In January 1971 two ISO Recommendations were adopted, ISO/R 2014-1971 "Writing of Calendar Dates in All-Numeric Form" and ISO/R 2015-1971 "Numbering of Weeks". In the introductions to these Recommendations it is stated that, in all forms of international traffic and exchange, dates must be clearly designated and able to be compared without any ambiguity. Delivery dates in purchasing contracts, transport plans and similar documents are frequently designated by referring to a certain week numbers. Since methods of numbering the week of the year vary from country to country it is very important to use a uniform numbering of weeks for international trade and the industrial planning of international companies.

2. As regards writing of calendar dates in all-numeric form, confusion often arises from misinterpretation of the significance of the numerals in a date written with numerals only; similar confusion does not arise when a month is spelled out, either in full or in abbreviated form.

3. The occasions on which an all-numeric date might be used have been examined and the advantages of the descending order, year - month - day, have been found to outweigh those for the ascending order, day - month - year, established in many parts of the world.

4. The advantages of this descending order include the following in particular :

- the ease with which the whole date may be treated as a single numeral for the purpose of filing and classification (e.g. for insurance or social security systems);
- arithmetic calculation, particularly in some computer uses;
- the possibility of continuing the order by adding digits for hour - minute - second.

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5. ISO/R 2014-1971 specifies the writing of dates of the Gregorian calendar and should be applied whenever a calendar date containing the elements year, month, day is written in all-numeric form. An all-numeric date should be expressed exclusively in arabic numerals, i.e. by using only the decimal digits 0, 1, 2, 3.....9 and, if required, a hyphen as the separator.

6. As examples of the implementation of this Recommendation, the 1st July 1971 should be written in one of the following ways :

(a) 19710701

(b) 1971-07-01

(c) 1971 07 01

7. The calendar week is a convenient time period for certain commercial and planning purposes. The above uniform numbering of calendar weeks necessitates a unique designation of the day on which that week begins. In ISO/R 2015-1971 it is stated that, for these commercial, planning and similar purposes for which a week number might be used, Monday has been found the most appropriate as the first day of the week.

8. ISO/R 2015-1971 should be applied in all cases where a definite week of the year is to be designated for commercial use and it lays down that a week number should always stand for a time period of seven days, that for the purpose of week numbering the first day of the week shall be Monday, and that week number one of a year is the first week containing four days or more of the new year.

9. The two above mentioned ISO Recommendations were drawn up by the Co-ordinating Committee on the Standardization of the Writing of Dates (DATCO), the Secretariat of which is held by the ISO Central Secretariat in Geneva. The draft Recommendations were circulated to all the ISO Member Bodies for enquiry in January 1970. They were approved subject to a few alterations of an editorial nature by 25 and 26 Member Bodies respectively. The draft Recommendations were then submitted to the ISO Council which decided to accept them as ISO RECOMMENDATIONS. Copies of the two Recommendations which are available in English, French and Russian may be obtained through the national standards organizations.